

-18-

CLAIMS

1. A method for producing release of intracellular material from one or more cells comprising applying a voltage of not more than 50 volts to a suspension containing said cell or cells.

2. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said voltage is from 0.5 to 50 volts.

3. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said voltage is from 0.5 to 15 volts.

4. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said voltage is from 1 to 10 volts.

5. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said voltage is applied between electrodes spaced by no more than 10mm in said suspension.

6. A method as claimed in Claim 5, wherein said voltage is applied between electrodes spaced by no more than 5mm in said suspension.

7. A method as claimed in Claim 6, wherein said electrode spacing is no more than 1.5 mm.

8. A method as claimed in Claim 6, wherein said electrode spacing is no more than 0.5 mm.

9. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said cells are bacterial cells, yeast cells, plant cells, animal cells, insect cells or human cells.

10. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said voltage is applied for a period of at least 30 seconds.

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-19-

11. A method as claimed in Claim 10, wherein said voltage is applied for a period of at least 2 minutes.

5 12. A method as claimed in Claim 11, wherein said voltage is applied continuously for a said period.

10 13. A method of producing single stranded nucleic acid which comprises releasing double stranded nucleic acid from cells by applying a voltage of not more than 50 volts to a suspension of said cells with an electrode to release nucleic acid from said cells and denaturing the double stranded nucleic acid by applying the same or a different voltage to said suspension with said electrode to convert said double stranded nucleic acid to single stranded nucleic acid.

15 14. A method as claimed in Claim 13, wherein to produce said denaturation, a voltage of from 0.5 to 3 volts is applied.

20 15. A method as claimed in Claim 13, wherein to produce said denaturation, a voltage of from 1.5 to 2.5 volts is applied.

25 16. A method as claimed in Claim 13, wherein the denaturation is conducted in the presence of a promoter which assists denaturation.

30 17. A method as claimed in Claim 16, wherein said promoter compound is methyl viologen or a salt thereof or is a multivalent inorganic cation.

35 18. A process of amplifying a target sequence of nucleic acid comprising denaturation, hybridisation, and replication of nucleic acid wherein the nucleic acid is released from a cell by a method comprising applying a voltage of not more than 50 volts to a suspension containing said cell or cells,

-20-

and said denaturation is conducted by  
subjecting a solution containing said nucleic acid to a  
voltage applied between electrodes for a period of up to  
2 minutes under conditions such as to convert at least a  
portion of the nucleic acid to a wholly or partially  
single-stranded form in the solution.

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10 19. An amplification process as claimed in Claim 18, wherein  
the amplification procedure is PCR or LCR.

15 20. A process for replicating a nucleic acid which  
comprises: releasing double stranded nucleic acid from  
cells by a method comprising applying a voltage of not more  
than 50 volts to a suspension containing said cell or cells, separa-  
ting the strands of a sample double-stranded nucleic acid in  
solution under the influence of an electrical voltage applied to the  
solution from an electrode; hybridising the separated strands of the  
nucleic acid with at least one oligonucleotide primer  
that hybridises with at least one of the strands of the  
denatured nucleic acid; synthesising an extension  
product of the or each primer which is sufficiently  
complementary to the respective strand of the nucleic  
acid to hybridise therewith; and separating the or each  
extension product from the nucleic acid strand with  
which it is hybridised to obtain the extension product.

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25 21. A process for detecting the presence or absence of a  
predetermined nucleic acid sequence in a cell which  
comprises: releasing nucleic acid from the cell by a  
method comprising applying a voltage of not more than 50 volts to  
a suspension containing said cell or cells, denaturing released double-  
stranded nucleic acid by means of a voltage applied to the nucleic acid;  
hybridising the denatured nucleic acid with an oligonucleotide probe  
for the sequence; and determining whether the said hybridisation has  
occurred.

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